

Regular Attendees		Present
Fifi Ball	Director of Operations	Y
Jeff Brainerd	Standing Committee member	Y
Kate Crosby	Standing Committee member	Y
Howard Dana	Senior Minister	Y
Dave Elwood	Standing Committee member	Y
Kristin Haddad	Standing Committee member	Y
Peter Nobile	Clerk	Y
Patty Popov	Standing Committee member	Y
Toby Smith Ropeik	Standing Committee member	Y
Mark Russell Prior	Chair	Y
Lora Venesy	Standing Committee member	Y
Alec Walker	Standing Committee member	Y
Tom Wilson	Treasurer	Y
Guests	Representing	
Suzanne Foley	Nominating Committee, Annual Pledge Campaign	Y
Richard Keleher	Facilities Advisory and Research Group	Y
Leslie Pelton Nichols	RE Council	Y
Caroline Minkin	RE Council	Y
David Ropeik	UU Mass Bay District	Y

Howard opened with a reading by Barbara Merritt of the UU church in Worcester. The reading was followed by a moment of silence.

A motion was made to approve the December 2015 minutes, as amended, and was approved unanimously.

Chair’s report

- Mark recommended that committee members review and become familiar with Darien Smith’s email regarding her work with the UUA’s Annual Program Fund and District, and as a member of the Steering Group of the newly forming Generosity Network.
- Mark reminded the committee that the February regular Standing Committee meeting (on 2/7) will start at 1PM, not 6PM.

Minister's report

- There were no comments on Howard’s report as submitted. Howard added two additional items to his report: first, that seven new members joined First Parish today (1/10/15), and second that the 2016-17 internship position has been offered to a candidate.
- RE: attendance number summary (attached), Howard reported that about 1/3 of the congregation

shows up less than once a month. Lora pointed out that the RE teachers are tracking attendance in their classes separately. Howard would like to combine that count with that of the ushers in the sanctuary. Usher counts are approximate, and can vary +/- 20%. The membership list has been purged of duplicates and errors, and Howard is not alarmed by the numbers in the current summary. He and Tom pointed out that Sunday service attendance is only one way of measuring participation. Pledge dollars are another sure measure. Building use is yet another metric: there were around 1,400 events at First Parish in 2014.

- The Annual Pledge Campaign planning is starting in earnest.
- Black Lives Matter update: Upcoming events include a coffee house fundraiser for the Cambridge Black Lives Matter organization and all-church reading sessions. There has been some discussion about creating an affinity group made up of people of color/friends of First Parish. First Parish Facebook comments rose by 1000% in response to the banner; people have walked in off the street with supportive comments. Only one negative comment, a strongly worded statement that “all lives matter”, has been received.

Director of Operations’ report: FY2016 Budget Update

- Fifi reported that on-time mailing of quarterly statements is driving up more consistent payment of pledges. There was a short discussion about a drop in box collections and the importance of balancing acknowledgment of pledges while also asking for additional funds in the Sunday offerings.
- Fuel oil and snow removal costs are lower than budgeted amounts because of the warmer winter.
- Mark asked whether Standing Committee members felt comfortable with their ability to read financial reports. Fifi offered to help members individually or in groups. One member expressed interest, and Fifi will work with that person to set up time to review the reports in detail. Other members are welcome to attend.
- No spending adjustments were requested.
- Sanctuary – Terrace stairway update. Mark explained that the SC’s role is not to manage the activities surrounding the stairway, and that such operational activities would fall under the jurisdiction of Howard as head-of-staff. Howard commented that the funding for any solution would have to be approved by the SC. Richard Keleher reported that the FARG (Facilities Advisory and Research Group) was asked to look into solutions for making the stairs safer. Richard handed out a summary (attached) and reviewed the progress to date. Problems include: jog in handrail, width of stair, and bottom riser height. Some actions have already been performed; orange cones have been placed on the stairway to guide people toward the railings. Mark reported that he had observed the stairway traffic after service today and noted that the cones worked well and that people also managed the railings well. Members expressed support for making the stairway safer as soon as possible. The FARG will look into other options to address the issues raised. Howard pointed out that the money to fix the stairs would have to be identified, and that there are other risk areas in the church which could add to potential costs. The next steps are for Howard to identify potential risk areas in the church and to propose potential funding sources to pay for any necessary changes.

Treasurer's report

- Tom reported that the Finance Committee will be meeting on 1/11 to evaluate survey results and will report back in February.

Group/Liaison reports

Subgroups:

- a. Leadership Selection – Alec reported that SC interviews are scheduled; interviews should be complete by mid-February.
- b. Evaluation – **Toby and Dave have drafted a Senior Minister evaluation to be distributed to about a dozen non-SC parishioners.** Lora reported that the SC evaluation group is doing well (having achieved the formation of a Governance subgroup, held the first SC retreat, and begun Congregational conversations), but that all activity items should have specific timelines so that they are not forgotten.
- c. Congregational Outreach – Dave reported that a forum is set for February 7th, with topic(s) TBD. Another discussion will be held on February 9th. Kate reported a good response to the “I’m a member of the Standing Committee” sign.

Liaisons:

- a. Denominational Affairs – Guest David Ropeik reported that the current recommendation by the Mass Bay District (MBD) board, is to dissolve the District. Discussions are underway about what to do with the MBD money. These ideas will be proposed to the MBD at the district annual meeting and if approved the funds would be appropriately dispersed. Energy levels on the MDB board are low.
- b. SAC – a meeting is coming up on 1/12/16

Members' reports

- Alec has heard several genuine expressions of pride about putting up the BLM banner, including admiration for the SC's quick action on the issue.
- A parishioner asked Kate why there are no hangings behind the pulpit any more. Kate also received a suggestion that the Concord Journal should have more information about FP schedules and activities.
- Mark heard from two different parishioners that the RE program seems extremely well organized and easy for people to get involved. Mark also mentioned that, inspired by Howard's sermon about reaching out to others, he had a very positive coffee hour conversation with a newcomer to First Parish, and he acknowledged the value in working to overcome initial awkwardness.

FY 2016 spending priorities discussion

Tom presented a brief summary of pledging patterns and also a list of spending priorities generated by the Finance Committee (attached). Tom requested that SC members provide feedback on spending priorities and also on the amount of funding that might be pledged for the next fiscal year. This discussion would provide budget guidance to Howard and Fifi in support of their preparation for the annual campaign and the budget development process. (It is important to note that the funding proposed in the FY17 budget will be dependent on pledging and other revenues, and it might be necessary to reduce or eliminate current activities in favor of additional or expanded activities in other areas. Also funding priorities are likely to change and become more

solid as the year progresses.)

In addition to the priorities collected from the congregation, two items were added to the list by Howard, including increasing the Youth Director position from 10 to 15 hours per week (approx. \$7,000 increase), and providing health insurance for the ministerial intern (approx. \$7,800 increase).

Reduction/elimination of RE Fees: The discussion opened with a request from Leslie Pelton, Chair of the Religious Education Council, on behalf of the council, that First Parish move toward eliminating RE fees. One of the goals of the RE Council is to more fully integrate the RE program into the First Parish community. Eliminating fees, and funding RE from our other revenues would change what is perceived to be a fee-for-service approach to RE. There was general support within the Standing Committee for this action, as long as other forms of revenue could be found to fund the activities now funded by fees.

Staff pay increases: Members recognized the high quality of work performed by staff and spoke in support of providing at least small salary increases, to offset increases in the cost of living and to prevent salaries from falling too far behind UUA guidelines that have been used to ensure that salaries are fair and competitive.

Capital improvements: It will be important to include funding for capital improvements and remediation of potential safety issues. Last year the budget contained a small amount of funding for infrastructure investment. This funding might be used during the current year, or it might be carried over and used on a future project. Another approach might be to perform special fundraising for selected capital improvements.

Denominational support: SC members were supportive of continuing to advance toward full payment of UUA dues. Currently, the total amount requested is calculated using the number of active congregation members. However, the UUA is currently considering another approach, instead calculating the amount due using a percentage of the congregation's total operating budget.

Social Action Director Salary: Members briefly discussed the idea of moving the Social Action Director salary out of the Social Action Grants line item into an operations line item. This action will be considered at a later date, after the ongoing social action exploration has been completed. It is unlikely that a decision will be made prior to this year's annual meeting.

Pledge Revenues: Over the last few years, First Parish has relied on a small number of large, one time donations to fill a funding gap and allow expansion of critical programs such as pastoral care and religious education. As these generous donors reduce their donations, there is a need for other parishioners in the lower and middle levels to increase their pledges to support the programs. If funds are not sufficient to cover current operations, funding for some program activities would be reduced. If long term revenue estimates turn out to be lower than currently projected, consideration should be given to holding back a portion of the gap funds to reduce the impact of funding cuts in future years. Howard and Fifi will be preparing for all of these possibilities as they develop the FY17 budget.

FY17 Pledge estimates: In order to provide Howard and Fifi with revenue estimates they can use for budget preparation, SC members considered a number of potential revenue levels. After discussion, the sense of the committee was that there is reason for optimism. Per household pledge averages increased last year, and there is a lot of positive energy coming from parishioners. Planning for a 5% increase in pledge income would be realistic. Optimistically, pledge revenues might increase by 7%. Members recognized the possibility that the increase could be lower than 5%.

Other SC Member Business

SC members reviewed and discussed progress on our annual goals. Members will continue to pursue the agreed upon goals. Peter will work with Howard to organize a field trip to the UUA office in Boston. One of the goals related to “right relations” might be adjusted. Mark will reach out to the UUA Right Relations group to identify potential resources.

The Standing Committee entered into Executive Session to discuss a confidential personnel matter. The Executive Session and regular meeting were both adjourned at 10:05 pm.

/pn

attachments

Adult Sunday Worship Service Attendance at First Parish in Concord

September through December 2013 through 2015

	2013	2014	2015
September			
1st	445	275	90* (summer)
2nd	334	271	321
3rd	263	198	272
4th	271	328	251
October			
1st	277	319	316
2nd	129	149	184
3rd	289	293	245
4th	291	302	218
November			
1st	398	245	210
2nd	224	184	194
3rd	302	277	239
4th	329	475	279
5th		127	121
December			
1st	187	245	297
2nd	253	369	232
3rd	Snow Storm*	387	249
4th	440	88	79
5th	71		
Average	281	267	231
	Two services+	One service	One service

Numbers do not include children, youth, or RE teachers.

* Not included in the average

+ 2013 numbers may include the choir being counted double.

"EXIT GALLERY" STAIRWAY

PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE FACILITIES ADVISORY AND RESEARCH GROUP

We were asked by Doug 'Baker to look at the safety of the stair, due to several falls.

We found:

1. Jog in hand railing was a cause. Although literally not allowed by Code, jogs like this were often employed for ease of construction (e.g. Emerson Umbrella and older railings in the church). And we have been told that they are often used in residential construction today, for the same reason.
2. We have observed many times people leaving the sanctuary after service three abreast, with the middle person not having a railing to hold on to. We are an aging congregation with people with disabilities, for which this can be a problem.
3. The bottom riser is higher than allowed by Code.

This is a work in progress; I am currently polling the Group, at the request of Doug and am receiving some feedback and suggestions.

It has not been easy to get prices for this work; the first contractor (a First Parishioner) that we reached out to never gave us prices.

DISCUSSION OF PRIORITIES FOR 2017 (from Congregational Conversations, Oct/Nov. 2015)

1. Increase Pastoral Care Ministers hours from 30 to 40:		\$25,000 (+tax & benefits)
2. Reduce RE Fees:	All fees	\$20,050
	Exclude COA, Crafts Fair	\$13,650
3. Full denominational support		\$31,446 additional
4. Replace staffing costs to fully support 7 ½% of pledges for Social Action		\$31,518
5. Stair case and Steeple Repair:		Unknown
6. Railing on stairs in pulpit		Unknown
7. Reinstate Membership Director (estimate, depends on hours)		\$35,000 (+ tax & benefits)
8. Lifespan/Adult Educational programming		To be determined
9. Investments to generate more "green" initiatives – Energy Audit est.		\$10,000 - \$20,000
10. Salary increases to staff (3% x \$690,033) (w/o adds for ben, taxes)		\$20,701

Are there other areas that need to be added?

WHAT ARE OUR PRIORITIES AND WHAT ARE THE LEVELS FOR THESE INVESTMENTS:

Top Priority – Put into the budget

Second Priority – Put into the budget if pledge levels are achieved

Third Priority – Add to "wish list" for future consideration

Discussion and Planning for 2017 Budget and Pledge Income

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Year	Pledge Income	% change	Dollar change
2016	\$ 949,604	12%	\$ 104,454
2015	\$ 845,150	-10%	\$ (93,699)
2014	\$ 938,849	9%	\$ 75,736
2013	\$ 863,113	-3%	\$ (27,248)
2012	\$ 890,361	11%	\$ 90,296
2011	\$ 800,065	3%	\$ 19,950
2010	\$ 780,115		

Average Change 3.7%

Analysis of pledge patterns

	5 year Avg	2016
Increased	40%	37%
New	9%	12%
No Change	33%	36%
Decreased	18%	15%
No Pledge	15%	12%

Total No.	425	448
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DISCUSSION OF PLEDGE TARGET

How much can we ask from the congregation?

2016 Pledge Total \$ 949,604

		<i><u>New Total:</u></i>
3%	\$ 28,488	\$ 978,092
5%	\$ 47,480	\$ 997,084
7%	\$ 66,472	\$ 1,016,076
10%	\$ 94,960	\$ 1,044,564
12%	\$ 113,952	\$ 1,063,556